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SOLI SORABJEE 9 MARCH 1930 • 30 APRIL 2021

FORMER ATTORNEY GENERAL SOLI SORABJEE PASSES AWAY

Distinguished jurist and ex-Attorney General Soli Sorabjee, who appeared in many historic cases like S R Bommai, passed away on Friday

WAS ADMITTED IN HOSPITAL FOR COVID

He was admitted to a private hospital in South Delhi after getting infected with Covid-19. He is survived by his wife, daughter and two sons. A recipient of the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award of India, the renowned human rights lawyer served as the Attorney General for India from 1989-90 and then from 1998-2004

APPEARED IN MANY HISTORIC CASES

- Born in a Parsi family in 1930, Sorabjee enrolled at the bar in 1953 and was designated senior advocate by the Bombay HC in 1971
- He appeared in many important cases including the Kesavananda Bharati matter on basic structure doctrine and the S R Bommai matter relating to invocation of President's rule in states

2000-2006

SORABJEE SERVED AS A MEMBER OF THE U.N. WORLD COURT AT THE HAGUE FOR SIX YEARS

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FIR on oxygen appeal to draw contempt: SC

Hearing must make a difference, says bench

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

COMING down heavily on states that had ordered registration of FIRs against individuals appealing for help or sharing grievances on social media or elsewhere during the ongoing Covid pandemic, the Supreme Court on Friday warned that any such action will be treated as contempt of court.

A three-judge bench comprising Justices D Y Chandrachud, L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat said, "We will treat this as contempt of our court. Let us hear the voices of our citizens and not clamp down."

The bench was hearing a *suo motu* case on the national plan to manage the Covid surge. The Uttar Pradesh government had recently ordered civil and criminal action against those making false appeals over social media seeking help for Covid-19.

Regarding the situation in Delhi, where there is an acute paucity of oxygen and ICU beds, the bench urged the Centre to expedite plans to save lives. It also asked the AAP government to adopt a cooperative attitude and a spirit of dialogue with the Centre. The bench posed 10 questions to the Centre, adding: "Our hearing must make a difference." A detailed order will be available on Saturday. The next hearing is slated for May 10.

The judges questioned the national vaccination programme with Justice Bhat asking Solicitor General Tushar Mehta why the Centre cannot buy 100% of the requirement. Sharing concern over the possible exclusion of the marginalised communities from the drive, the court said, "Fifty-nine crore Indians in 18-45 age group constitute a large segment. How will the poor and marginalised people find money to get vaccinated? We cannot have this private sector model."

Turning to the procurement policy, the bench said the jabs the states have to procure are overpriced. "AstraZeneca is providing vaccines at a far lower price to the US. Then why should we be paying so much? Manufacturers are charging you ₹150 but ₹300 or ₹400 to states. Why should we as a nation pay this? The price difference becomes ₹30-40,000 crore," Justice Ravindra Bhat asked. P9

Govt's special role to help Delhi

Delhi represents people from the entire country, the bench said. "Centre has a peculiar role. Forget if someone wasn't able to lift oxygen; you (Centre) have to push through to protect lives."

10 POINT POSER

- Mechanism to show real time data on oxygen allocation to hospitals doable?
- Restrictions to curb spread of Covid; measures to ensure tankers and cylinders reach destination?
- How to enable vax registration for illiterates or those without internet access?
- Will one state get priority access over another to get jabs? How will manufacturers ensure equity?
- Has Centre considered invoking Section 92 of the Patents Act to grant compulsory licences in the face of an emergency like this?
- New variant isn't getting detected in RT-PCR test. Medical centres are driving away patients without positive report or charging high sums. What's the policy in place?
- How have testing labs been directed to track second mutant variant? How is reasonable time frame met for reports?
- What steps to regulate very high hospital bills?
- What about shortage of med staff? How are docs safeguarded and treated for Covid?
- How much oxygen will be made available to critical states?

A Covid-19 patient awaits admission for treatment at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital in Ajmer, Rajasthan, on Friday | PTI

NATIONWIDE	APRIL 29	APRIL 30
Fresh cases	3,79,257	3,86,452
Recoveries	2,69,507	2,97,540
Deaths	3,645	3,498

JAB-O-METER TAKE YOUR SHOT

April 29 **20,84,931 doses**

April 30 **26,08,948 doses**

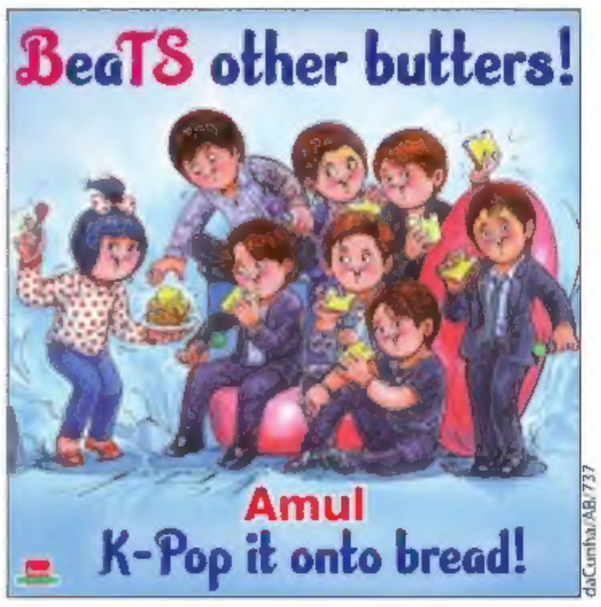
TOTAL DOSES: 15,48,54,096

OUR IPL SPACE

A government school in Edamuri, Pathanamthitta (Kerala) is taking up veg cultivation to feed nearby villagers. The headmaster, teachers & staff have been cultivating vegetables in the one acre free land in the campus | P13

INDIA TO GET 5 MN DOSES OF SPUTNIK BY JUNE

India will get 5 mn doses of Russian Covid vaccine Sputnik V by June, India's ambassador to Russia Bala Venkatesh Varma said on Friday. "We expect 1.5-2 lakh readymade vaccines to be available in the early part of May. This will be increased by the middle and the latter part of May. It is likely that by May, total sputnik V doses will be probably more than 3 million," he said



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SEDITION LAW UNDER APEX COURT LENS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

AMID rising instances of state governments slapping charges of sedition against dissenting individuals, the Supreme Court on Friday sought response from the Centre on a plea challenging the Constitutional validity of the law.

A bench of Justices U U Lalit, Indira Banerjee and K M Joseph was hearing a plea challenging Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, which penalises sedition.

The plea, filed by journalists Kishorechandra Wangkhemcha and Kanhaiya Lal Shukla — working in Manipur and Chhattisgarh, respectively — urged the top court to declare Section 124-A as unconstitutional.

The SC will give a detailed hearing in July. This comes months after a similar plea was dismissed by the court.

The petition claimed that section 124-A infringes the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression, guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

Cases were registered against the journalist under Section 124A for comments and cartoons shared by them on Facebook.

There is frequent misuse, misapplication and abuse of Section 124-A since 1962, the petition said, adding that the abuse of a law, in itself, may not bear on the validity of the law but clearly points to the vagueness and uncertainty of the current law.

The petition also argued that the vagueness of Section 124-A exerts an unacceptable chilling effect on the democratic freedoms of individuals who cannot enjoy their legitimate democratic rights and freedoms for fear of life imprisonment.

B'luru tops 3 states in active cases

NIRAD MUDUR @ Bengaluru

FOR those wondering why the curfew restrictions need to be taken seriously — call it 'lockdown' if you want — consider this: On Friday, with Karnataka recording a maddening addition of 48,296 fresh Covid-19 cases to its tally, the total number of active cases in Bengaluru alone has crossed the individual figures of the entire states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. If it is any consolation, Kerala is the only other southern state whose active cases — currently under treatment — are more than Bengaluru's.

Bengaluru itself added a whopping 26,756 cases on Friday. While the number of active cases in Bengaluru stands at a massive 2,59,058, Andhra Pradesh has 1,22,980; Tamil Nadu, 1,15,128; and Telangana, 77,727 cases. The total number of active cases in the whole of Karnataka is 3,82,690, while Kerala's active cases add up to 3,03,732.

To understand how intensely the second wave is raging in Karnataka,

STATEWIDE	APRIL 29	APRIL 30
Fresh cases	35,024	48,296
Recoveries	14,142	14,884
Deaths	270	217

the highest single-day addition in the first wave was 10,974 on October 7, 2020, while Friday's addition of 48,296 is so far the highest day's addition.

According to health officials, the detection of cases has gone up because of the increased testing. But if one closely sees the number of tests conducted on October 7 last year, when the first wave's highest additions were recorded, and compare them with the number of tests reported in Friday health bulletin, it is clear that the cases are spiraling in the state not just because of increased testing, but because of a more intense spread of infection. P4

EXPRESS READ

Core sectors' output rises 6.8 pc in March

New Delhi: The output of eight core sectors grew by 6.8 per cent in March, the highest in 32 months, driven by base effect-led uptick in production of natural gas, steel, cement and electricity, official data showed on Friday.

Pope facilitates Vatican prosecution of cardinals

Rome: Pope Francis has sent another message to Vatican cardinals and bishops about his intent to hold them accountable for misconduct. A new law makes clear that Vatican prosecutors have jurisdiction over Holy See cardinals and need only the Pope's consent to investigate. P11

18+: Don't storm the hospitals, no vax supply yet

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

IF you are in the 18-44-year age group and have registered on the CoWIN portal to get vaccinated in Karnataka, you will have to wait for some more time.

A day after *TNIE* reported that the fourth phase of the Covid-19 inoculation drive may begin only by mid-May, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar said vaccine supplies have not reached Karnataka and hence, the rollout cannot happen from May 1.

CONTINUED ON: P4

Drones to sanitise parts of Bengaluru, deliver medicines

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IN what is being touted as a first-of-its kind initiative in the country, CM B S Yediyurappa on Friday launched a drone-based sanitation initiative for Bengaluru.

The exercise, taken up by Bengaluru Central MP P C Mohan, and his special task force that was formed two weeks ago to tackle Covid-19 in his constituency, in partnership with drone startup Garuda Aerospace, will ensure sanitisation of the Lok Sabha segment over the next 10 days with the help of drones.

CONTINUED ON: P4

Non-food bank loans hit an all-time low of 4.9 pc in FY2020-21

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

NON-food bank credit growth plunged to an all-time low of 4.9% in FY21, according to RBI data. This is the first time growth touched such a low since 1971 when RBI began publishing data separately for food and non-food credit. Non-food credit includes loans given to industries, services sector, retail loans and agriculture and allied activities. This, along with food credit and priority sector loans, defines overall bank credit. Decline in non-food credit is critical as it accounts for 88% of overall bank credit.

According to RBI's deployment of gross bank credit by major sectors released on Friday, industrial credit growth fell to 0.4% in FY21 from 0.7% in FY20. But within this, large industries saw a decline of 0.8%. A year ago, it stood at a relatively respectable 0.6%.

In contrast, medium industries saw a growth of 28.8%, perhaps led by the government's credit-driven stimulus. But micro and small industries saw growth go from 1.7% in FY20 to a 0.5% in FY21. Services sector including tourism, hotels and restaurants, too saw credit growth decline from 7.4% to a dismal 1.4% during the same period.

Several segments of non-food sectors, barring agriculture, medium industries and gold loans, saw credit growth decline over the previous fiscal. This includes retail loans such as housing, consumer durables and education loans.

Gross bank credit at ₹97 lakh crore excluding priority sector loans plunged to 5% -- perhaps hitting an all-time low. Including priority sector loans to agriculture and industries, overall bank credit growth in FY21 stood at ₹109.5 lakh crore, or a growth of 5.6% — the lowest in 58 years.

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